

Friday, June 22, 2007

Board Members Meet To Discuss Pipeline and Marine Accidents

The National Transportation Safety Board met on Thursday, June 14, to discuss two accidents. The office of Railroad, Pipeline, and Hazardous Materials presented the first item on the agenda, the Anhydrous Ammonia Release Near Kingman, Kansas in October 2004. The second item on the agenda was the Fire Aboard Construction Barge Athena 106, in October 2006.

It was determined that damage by construction equipment or excavation activity probably caused the pipeline rupture that resulted in the release of 204,000 gallons (4,858 barrels) of anhydrous ammonia in Kingman, Kansas. The released material created a highly toxic vapor cloud but there were no injuries associated with the accident. Chemicals from the pipeline entered a nearby stream in an environmentally sensitive area and killed more than 25,000 fish, including some fish from threatened species.

At about 11:15 am on October 27, 2004, an 8 5/8-inch diameter steel pipeline operated by Enterprise Products Operating L.P. ruptured and released about 204,000 gallons (4,858 barrels) of anhydrous ammonia in an agricultural area about 6 miles east of Kingman, Kansas.

The Board found that the probable cause of the rupture was a pipe gouge created by heavy equipment damage to the pipeline during construction in 1973 or subsequent excavation activity at an unknown time that initiated metal fatigue cracking and led to the eventual rupture of the pipeline.

Contributing to the severity of the accident was the pipeline controller's failure to accurately evaluate available operating data and initiate a timely shutdown of the pipeline.



In the meeting's second item, the Board determined that the failure of Athena Construction to require its crews to pin mooring spuds securely in place on its barges led to an unintentional release of one of the spuds. This resulted in a pipeline rupture that killed six.

On October 12, 2006, the uninspected towing vessel Miss Megan was pushing two deck barges in the West Cote Blanche Bay oil field in Louisiana, en route to a pile-driving location. Barge Athena 106 was tied along the port side of barge IBR 234. The Miss Megan was secured astern of IBR 234 pushing both barges. While the vessels were under way, the aft spud (a vertical steel shaft extending through a well in the bottom of the boat and used for mooring) on the Athena 106 released from its fully raised position. The spud dropped into the water and struck a submerged, high-pressure natural gas pipeline. The resulting gas released ignited and created a fireball that engulfed the towing vessel and both barges. The master of the towing vessel and four barge workers were killed. The Miss Megan deckhand and one barge worker survived. One barge worker is officially listed as missing.

"Having more rigorous requirements in place could have prevented this accident from occurring," said NTSB Chairman Mark Rosenker. "Not only do these regulations need to be put in place but it is imperative that they are enforced and adhered to."

The Board stated in its final report that Athena Construction's manual contained no procedures mandating the use of the safety devices on the spud winch except during electrical work. It was found that if the Athena 106 crew had used the steel pins to secure the retracted spuds during their transit, a pin would have prevented the aft spud from accidentally deploying. Furthermore, the spud would have remained locked in its lifted position regardless of whether the winch brake mechanism, the spud's supporting cable, or a piece of connecting hardware had failed.

Contributing to the accident was the failure of Central Boat Rentals to require, and the Miss Megan master to ensure, that the barge spuds were securely pinned before getting under way. The Board noted that investigators found no evidence that the Miss Megan master or deckhand checked whether the spuds had been properly secured before the tow began. While Central Boat Rentals had a health and safety manual and trained its crews, the written procedures did not specifically warn masters about the need to secure spuds or other barge equipment before navigating. The company's crew should have been trained to identify potential safety hazards on vessels under their control.

Chairman Rosenker Visits Alaska and Hawaii

NTSB Chairman Mark Rosenker recently traveled to Alaska and Hawaii to promote transportation safety. On June 8, Chairman Rosenker met with Hawaii Governor Linda Lingle to discuss various transportation related issues. During the meeting, the Chairman and Governor Lingle reviewed current NTSB recommendations regarding recent helicopter air tour accidents, along with the need for boating safety education in Hawaii, and various highway-related recommendations that the NTSB has made. Also, while in Hawaii, Chairman Rosenker met with staff at US Coast Guard Sector Honolulu and took a tour of their Command Center. Bill Gossard and Tom Doyle accompanied the Chairman to Hawaii.

The next week, Chairman Rosenker traveled to Anchorage and Fairbanks, Alaska to meet with various officials of the aviation, pipeline, and rail industries. During their visit to Alaska, the Chairman, accompanied by Bob Chipkevich and Tom Doyle, had the opportunity to tour the operations center of Alyeska Pipeline in Fairbanks, and join-in on various events taking place as a part of the 30th Anniversary of the pipeline. They also visited with the Anchorage Regional Office and met with staff at the FAA to discuss the Capstone project, currently underway in Alaska. Later in the week, Chairman Rosenker met with staff from Congressman Stevens, Murkowski, and Young's offices in efforts to promote the importance of transportation safety in Alaska. Finally, the Chairman met with the President of the Alaska Railroad to discuss their use of Positive Train Control, and took a tour of their Dispatch Center and Incident Response Center in Anchorage.

Vice Chairman Sumwalt Interviewed For Weather Book



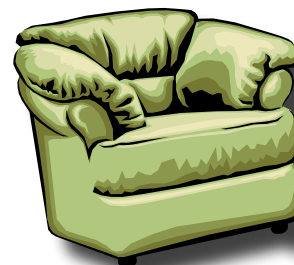
Vice Chairman Robert L. Sumwalt was interviewed by author Jack Williams for his upcoming book on "weather and climate" for the general public. During the interview, Vice Chairman Sumwalt discussed his experience as an airline captain with the Air Line Pilots Association Aviation Weather Committee, and his current concerns about aviation weather.

The American Meteorological Society and the University of Chicago Press will publish the book in 2008. Previously, Williams wrote the USA TODAY Weather Book which was published in 1992.

***Vice Chairman Sumwalt and
Jack Williams***

NTSB Capitalizes on Excess Furniture

The Office of Administration (AD) has been working with the Department of Transportation since April to obtain excess furniture that will otherwise be disposed of as DOT vacates the Nassif Building and completes their move to the Southeast Federal Center. You may notice some additional tables, sofas, chairs, desks, and other items appearing around the agency. The AD staff is making every effort to fill identified needs at NTSB Headquarters while capitalizing on unexpected opportunities to acquire special pieces of furniture that would be very expensive to purchase. Although some sets were obtained, NTSB staff should not expect that they will receive new office workstations out of this effort, since these are not readily available from the excess inventory at DOT. The Administrative Services Division (AD-10) manages the replacement of office furniture based upon a furniture replacement plan, which prioritizes first for safety, then for deterioration and lastly, age. This effort will result in significant cost savings in replacement of nonfunctional and aging furniture pieces.



Welcome New Employees



Deborah D. Hall
Transportation Disaster Assistance Specialist
Office of Safety Recommendations & Advocacy
Transportation Disaster Assistance



Mary Jane Smith
Special Assistant
Office of Member Chealander